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LETTER DATED 29 APRIL 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ITALY TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to draw to your attention the text of a statement on Kosovo agreed by the members of the Contact Group at their meeting in Rome on 29 April 1998 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) F. Paolo FULCI

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Annex

Statement on Kosovo adopted by the members of the Contact Group in Rome on 29 April 1998

1. The Contact Group met in Rome on 29 April 1998 to decide on the next steps regarding the increasingly dangerous situation in Kosovo, taking into account the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Troika on developments since the Contact Group's ministerial meeting in Bonn on 25 March 1998 (see S/1998/272). They considered the report an important and balanced contribution to the assessment of the situation. The Contact Group believes that the current situation is untenable. The risk of an escalating conflict requires immediate action.

2. All members of the Contact Group are firmly opposed to independence for Kosovo and to a continuation of the unacceptable status quo. Immediate steps by the parties to reduce tension and to begin an unconditional dialogue are indispensable and the only way to reverse the deterioration in the situation and bring about a political solution.

3. The Contact Group condemns the increase in violence in recent days in Kosovo, in particular, the excessive use of force by the Yugoslav Army, and the proliferation of arms in the territory. The Contact Group absolutely rejects terrorism as a means of bringing about political change, as well as all other violence to suppress political dissent. The Contact Group calls upon political leaders in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and in the countries of the region to exercise maximum restraint, full respect for human rights, to prevent the introduction of arms and of armed groups from outside, and to condemn terrorism. It also calls upon the countries of the region to confirm the respect for territorial integrity and for the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

4. The Contact Group is not seeking to impose any particular outcome for the resolution of the differences between Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community. It is for the parties themselves to determine a solution to the political status of Kosovo through negotiations. The Contact Group notes that representatives of Belgrade and Pristina have recently stated their general willingness to open an unconditional dialogue. But the two sides have yet to agree with full authority on modalities for talks, particularly on the issue of international participation.

5. The Contact Group regards appropriate international involvement as an essential factor to establish confidence between the parties and to facilitate talks.

6. In order to begin the urgent process of dialogue, the Contact Group recommends and urges both Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community to adopt a framework for dialogue and a stabilization package:

(a) The framework should be based on fundamental principles that the parties must accept, such as rejection of violence for achieving political

goals, no preconditions, mutual respect, accordance with standards and principles of OSCE and of the Charter of the United Nations, mutually agreed modalities, and protection of all individuals and ethnic groups. There should be mutual assurances, which the Contact Group itself will support, that the parties will not abandon nor seek to undermine an agreement once it is reached. The framework for dialogue must be formally endorsed by the top leadership in Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovar Albanians. The respective leaders must take political responsibility for initiating talks in good faith. The framework must provide for international involvement in facilitating substantive negotiations.

(b) The stabilization package must include, as the minimum:

(i) Cessation of repression by the authorities in Belgrade, as specified in United Nations Security Council resolution 1160 (1998), and a strong condemnation of terrorism by the leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community.

(ii) Reopening of the OSCE missions in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including in Kosovo.

(iii) Concrete inter-communal confidence-building measures, including implementation of the education agreement according to the agreed timetable. The Contact Group appreciates and encourages the work of Sant'Egidio Community in this field.

7. The Contact Group attaches the highest priority to the immediate launching of the González mission, which is essential for substantial progress in the relationship between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the international community. This mission is also meant to reduce tension, restore confidence and improve general prospects for dialogue. The top leadership in Belgrade should therefore immediately invite the González mission to start its work. The Contact Group fully supports the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in his efforts to facilitate this mission.

8. If the leadership in Belgrade agrees to the framework for dialogue, the stabilization measures listed in paragraph 6 are implemented, the González mission is launched and substantive talks begin, the Contact Group will promote a clear and achievable path towards Belgrade's full integration into the international community, including participation in OSCE. We want the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to reap the benefits of membership in international financial and political institutions.

9. Crucial requirements set out in the Contact Group's statements of 9 and 25 March 1998 (S/1998/223, annex and S/1998/272, annex, respectively) have not yet been met. We have therefore decided to take action to put into effect a freeze on the funds held abroad by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbian Governments. If Belgrade takes the steps in paragraph 6 to bring about negotiations, we will immediately reverse this decision. We have also decided that, if dialogue is blocked because of Belgrade's non-compliance, we will, by 9 May, take action to stop new investment in Serbia. The Russian Federation does not associate itself with these measures.

10. If unresolved, the situation in Kosovo threatens to spill over into other parts of the region. The Contact Group attaches high priority to supporting the security interests of the neighbouring States and to ensuring security of borders. It is of particular importance that developments in Kosovo should not disrupt progress in implementing the Dayton/Paris peace agreement in Bosnia, to which the Government in Belgrade is committed. The Contact Group will contribute to the strict implementation of resolution 1160 (1998), working also with the United Nations and other relevant international forums.

11. The next meeting of the Contact Group will take place in Paris in May.